

# LEVEL I NOVELS

Averages: 58 pages of text/book  
103 words/page  
6,050 total words/book

## ***Listed in general order from easier readability to harder***

There are many factors that affect readability. The vocabulary level and the total word count do not always indicate the level of difficulty but they can give the teacher an idea. The total word count can help students to keep track of how many words they are reading and help teachers to set reading goals for students. See the ***considerations for choosing the readability order*** at the end of this document.

Some of the novels have been reviewed by college students, who have a one foot in the student world and one foot in the teacher world perspective.

1. **Las aventuras de Isabela**

Karen Rowan

**Novice-Low**

42 pages, 20 pages of text

2,200 total words

110 words/page

Present tense

200 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Adolescent fiction

**Setting:** Guanajuato, Mexico

*Text uses the yo, tú, él, nosotros & ellos forms; emphasis is on the 1st person.*

*Story contains some bizarre comments and actions, as in a Blaine Ray TPRS story, but more extreme. References to vomit and bodily functions (of a pony) for middle school laughs.*

*Chapter-by-chapter vocabulary lists and complete glossary.*

**College student commentary:** The language is simple and kept in mostly the present tense “yo” and “nosotros” form. The story is very simple but has some good cultural references to Mexico, I especially like the mention of eating chili with mango.

2. **Berto y sus buenas ideas**

Magaly Rodríguez

**Novice-Low**

42 pages, 19 pages of text

2,500 total words

131 words/page

Present tense

200 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Adolescent fiction

**Setting:** Spain

**A college student read this book and said:** I liked this book, especially since I have been to Madrid and have been to all the places that the book talked about. It mentions many historical and cultural sites such as the Prado Museum and Real Madrid Stadium Bernabeu. A teacher could do some fun cultural extensions with this book and have students investigate more about these places. The

reading level of this book was easy and chapters were broken up nicely to describe the different sites visited by Berto.

3. **Isabela captura un congo** Karen Rowan  
**Novice-Low**  
72 pages, 34 pages of text 3,500 total words 103 words/page  
Present tense 350 word vocabulary  
**Genre:** Juvenile fiction  
**Setting:** Costa Rica
  
4. **Carl no quiere ir a México** Karen Rowan  
**Novice-Low**  
46 pages, 37 pages of text 5,000 total words 135 words/page  
Present tense 350 word vocabulary  
**Genre:** Juvenile fiction  
**Setting:** Mexico
  
5. **Tumba** Mira Canion  
**Novice-Mid**  
64 pages, 25 pages of text 3,500 total words 140 words/page  
Present tense 100 word vocabulary  
**Genre:** Realistic fiction/mystery  
**Setting:** Mexico  
*Explains traditional Mexican beliefs about death and the afterlife, including a spirit entering a cat, but the “ghosts” in this novel are not the scary, supernatural type—more like Scooby-Doo. Encourages friendships, artistic ability, and standing up to bullies. References to actual historical events. This is a good one to use around the Day of the Dead.*
  
6. **Piratas del Caribe y el mapa secreto** Mira Canion&Carol Gaab  
**Novice-Mid**  
53 pages, 51 pages of text 6,800 total words 133 words/page  
Present tense 200 word vocabulary  
**Genre:** Historically-base adventure (fiction)  
**Setting:** Caribbean

7. **Agentes secretos y el mural de Picasso**

Mira Canion

**Novice-Mid**

84 pages, 47 pages of text

4,700 total words

100 words/page

Present tense

100 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Realisticfiction

**Setting:** Spain

Quality photos of Spain. Famous artwork “Guernica” by Pablo Picasso. Real history in real Spanish—this is as close as it gets to authentic literature for beginning level I students.

**College student commentary:** This is a great novice book. It is simple present tense with some subjunctive and negative commands even. But it flows well, seems more like a real story and less like a forced novice book. It also has great cultural and historical ties. Before reading, it might be good to explain a bit about Franco to students so they understand the context and meaning of the Guernica better.

8. **Pobre Ana**

Blaine Ray

**Novice-Mid**

39 pages, 39 pages of text

6,000 total words

154 words/page

Present tense

300 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Adolescent fiction

**Setting:** California/Tepic, Mexico

The situations are predictable and the story is thin, but this actually helps underconfident beginning readers to understand the text. Because the action takes place in Mexico there are many opportunities for the teacher to add more culture—you could talk for a couple of days about just the places and situations alluded to in chapter four, for example. The main character actually develops and changes in the story, as do many students that have the opportunity to travel.

9. **El nuevo Houdini**

Carol Gaab

**Novice-Mid**

62 pages, 43 pages of text

5,600 total words

130 words/page

Two versions in one book: Present on one side & Past on the flip side

200 word vocabulary, plus 100 cognates

**Genre:** Humor (adolescent fiction)

**Setting:** USA

Many cute half page cartoons.

10. **Rival**

Mira Canion

**Novice-Mid**



88 pages, 38 pages of text

5,400 total words

142 words/page

Past tense narration, present tense conversations;

100 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Realistic historical fiction**Setting:** Medieval Spain

This story involves real history and events portraying the religious conflict between Muslims and Christians in medieval Spain. Some cognates for unfamiliar words like acueducto & comandante may need explaining. Simple vocabulary makes the story accessible to lower levels despite past tense. The unfamiliar historical plot elements may make the reading more difficult for students than the 100-word vocabulary might imply.

11. **Fiesta fatal**

Mira Canion

**Novice-Mid**

75 pages, 46 pages of text

? total words

? words/page

Past tense narration, present tense conversations;

140 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Realistic teen fiction**Setting:** Morelia, Mexico & Lafayette, Colorado

This is the story of the adventures surrounding a girl's quinceañera and dangerous Mexican drug cartel elements. The unfamiliar drug war plot elements and the past tense narration may make the reading more difficult for students than the 140-word vocabulary might imply. But the simple vocabulary makes the story accessible to lower levels despite past tense. Black and white photographs of the Mexican and Colorado settings throughout the book add greatly to enriching student understanding of the text.

12. **Los piratas del Caribe y el Triángulo de las Bermudas**

Carol Gaab

**Novice-Low**

115 pages, 75 pages of text

9,900 total words

132 words/page

Past tense

280 word vocabulary

**Genre:**Historically-based Adventure/Science Fiction**Setting:**Bermuda

Includes comprehensive glossary and many half page pencil drawings and maps throughout.

13. **Esperanza**

Carol Gaab

**Novice-Low**

67 pages/ 66 pages of text

6,500 total words

98 words/page

1st person, present tense

200 word vocabulary

**Genre:**Biography, Non-fiction**Setting:**Guatemala/USA

The unusual first person narration style and the unfamiliarity with the content (unions, strikes and political asylum) may make this difficult for some level I students to understand, despite the tightly controlled vocabulary. This is a hope-filled novel; every chapter ends with the word *esperanza* (hope).

**A college student read this book and said:** This book was fun and did not have the feel of a beginning level book that is somewhat forced narratively so as to use only simple grammar and vocabulary. The reading level is a bit more advanced but still comprehensible for a novice. The plot did feel a bit complicated, as it is very fast moving. I enjoyed this story because it felt like a real story and is extremely relevant to real life situations going on in Central America.

14. **Noches misteriosas en Granada**

Kristy Placido

**Novice-Low**

65 pages, 63 pages of text

8,200 total words

130 words/page

Present tense

280 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Culture-based Mystery (fiction)

**Setting:** Granada, Spain

15. **Patricia va a California**

Blaine Ray

**Novice-Low**

45 pages, 45 pages of text

6,400 total words

142 words/page

Present tense

400 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Adolescent fiction

**Setting:** Panajachel, Guatemala / Ventura, California

Deals with discrimination against Latinos in the US and the benefit of not reacting in anger to those that provoke. This novel contains more authentic cultural references than many beginning novels, especially in chapters 1, 2 & 3. Some students may assume that this is the same Patricia mentioned as Ana's friend in *Pobre Ana*, which will need to be corrected.

16. **Felipe Alou: Desde los valles a las montañas**

Carol Gaab

**Novice-Low**

60 pages, 44 pages of text

5,900 total words

134 words/page

Past tense

150 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Biography (Non-Fiction)

**Setting:** Dominican Republic

Many half pages of text due to drawings and photographs. This is the real-life story of a pioneer in major league baseball, and the catalyst for the baseball phenomenon in the Dominican Republic. Unfamiliarity with baseball, discrimination and issues about civil rights may make this

story harder for some students to understand, despite the controlled vocabulary and liberal use of cognates. There are quality line drawings and authentic photographs throughout the book.

17. **Casi se muere**

**Novice-Low**

43 pages, 43 pages with text 5,800 total words

135 words/page

Present tense

400 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Adolescent fiction

**Setting:** California / Temuco, Chile

This is the book that started the recent phenomenon of interesting, comprehensible and cultural novels for level I students. The story deals with travel, bullying issues and dating. Some of the American pop cultural references seem a bit dated now.

18. **Amigos detectives**

Patricia Verano

**Novice-Mid**

73 pages, 44 pages with text 7,000 total words

159 words per full page

Present tense

400 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Culture-based adolescent mystery fiction

**Setting:** Bolivia, Lake Titicaca

Narration is in the first person, which may take some getting used to by some students, but provides many repetitions with the “yo” form. Has several charcoal drawings, many of animals mentioned in the story.

19. **La vampirata**

Mira Canion

**Novice-Low**

71 pages, 41 pages of text 5,600 total words

137 words/page

Past tense

240 word vocabulary

**Genre:** fiction

**Setting:** Colombia

20. **El primer trabajo de Roberto**

Laura Stade, Teacher’sDiscovery

**Novice-Mid**

47 pages, 35 pages with text 5,500 total words

157 words per full page

Present tense

200 word vocabulary

**Genre:** Culture-based adolescent fiction

**Setting:** Puerto Rico

The back cover says that the vocabulary is 200 first-year vocabulary words, but it seems harder than that. Narration is in the first person and so provides many repetitions with “yo” form verbs. There are several blank pages in the book. No illustrations. No glossary.

21. **Robo en la noche** Kristy Placido  
*Novice-Mid*  
74 pages, 64 pages of text 8,400 total words(each side) 131 words/page  
Present on one side & Past on the flip side  
400 word vocabulary  
**Genre:**Culture-based fiction  
**Setting:**Costa Rica
22. **Pío Pista** Michael Miller  
*Novice-Mid*  
48 pages 9,900 total words 206 words/page  
Present tense 400word vocabulary  
**Genre:**Adolescent mystery/humor fiction  
**Setting:**Puerto Rico
23. **El viaje de su vida** Lisa Ray Turner & Blaine Ray  
*Novice-Mid*  
44 pages, 44 pages of text 6,400 total words 145 words/page  
Present tense 500word vocabulary  
**Genre:**Adolescent culture-based mystery (fiction)  
**Setting:**Cruise ship in the Caribbean /Cancun / Chichen Itza, Mexico  
This is a mystery solving the theft of a valuable Mayan necklace.
24. **Pobre Ana bailó tango** P. Verano, V. Moscoso, Blaine Ray  
*Novice-Mid*  
49 pages,38 pages of text 9,100 total words 239 words/page  
Past tense 600 word vocabulary  
**Genre:**Realistic, culture-based adolescent fiction  
**Setting:**Argentina/ Tango school  
This is the same “Pobre Ana” character of Pobre Ana, Casi se muere, and ¡Viva el toro! This time she is in Argentina and learning to dance the tango. This book will be easier if students have read the previous books by Blaine Ray because they will be familiar with the vocabulary and story-telling style of the author.

# LEVEL II NOVELS

Averages: 67 pages /book  
140 words/page  
9,400 words/book

***Listed in order from easier readability to harder***

25. **Mi propio auto** Lisa Ray Turner & Blaine Ray  
**Novice-Mid**  
58 pages 9,100 total words 157 words/page  
Past tense  
Genre: Culturally-based fiction  
Setting: El Salvador
26. **Los Baker van a Perú** Nathaniel Kirby  
**Novice-Mid**  
51 pages 7,000 total words 137 words/page  
Past and present tense  
Genre: Adolescent fiction  
Setting: Peru
27. **¿Dónde está Eduardo?** Lisa Ray Turner & Blaine Ray  
**Novice-Mid**  
52 pages 8,600 total words 165 words/page  
Past tense  
Genre: Fiction  
Setting: Costa Rica
28. **El viaje perdido** Lisa Ray Turner & Blaine Ray  
**Novice-Mid**  
60 pages 8,900 total words 148 words/page  
Past tense  
Genre: Culture-based fiction  
Setting: Puerto Rico  
Travel/TL Beliefs



29. **Viva el toro** Lisa Ray Turner & Blaine Ray  
**Novice-Mid**  
**60 pages**      **8,000 total words**      **133 words/page**  
**Past tense**  
**Genre:** *Realistic culture-based fiction*  
**Setting:** *Spain/Bullfighting*  
Ana, from *Pobre Ana, Casi se muere* & *Pobre Ana bailó tango*, is at it again. This time she is visiting Seville, Spain. There are references to many famous sites in Seville that could promote further study and discussion. The plot involves both sides of the bullfighting issue—the cruelty and the historic artistry—sure to generate energetic discussions in class.
30. **Sueños de la isla** JJ Hill, Marissa Smith, Roberta Price  
**Novice-High**  
**39 pages**      **7,000 total words**      **179 words/page**  
**Past tense**  
**Genre:** *Culture-based sports fiction*  
**Setting:** *Dominican Republic*
31. **La maldición de la cabeza reducida** Nathaniel Kirby  
**Novice-High**  
**58 pages**      **7,200 total words**      **124 words/page**  
**Past tense**  
**Genre:** *Fiction*  
**Setting:** *Peru*
32. **Rebeldes de Tejas** Mira Canion  
**Novice-High**  
**90 pages**      **10,700 total words**      **119 words/page**  
**Past tense**  
**Genre:** *Historical fiction*  
**Setting:** *Mexico & Texas*  
**College student commentary:** I liked this book. It uses the past tense more and is a bit more advanced. This book is valuable because of the many extensions that could be made with it to history. Reading it made me want to brush up on my history and review the story of the Alamo and Santa Ana.
33. **Problemas en paraíso** Carol Gaab  
**Intermediate-Low**



Brycehedstrom.com

**72 pages**

**8,500 total words**

**118 words/page**

**Past tense**

**350 word vocabulary, 100's of cognates**

**Genre: fiction**

**Setting: Mexico**

# LEVEL III NOVELS

*Listed in order from easier readability to harder*

34. **Los ojos de Carmen** Verónica Moscoso  
*Intermediate-Low*  
*47 pages, 44 pages of text*     7,500 total words     **170 words/page**  
**Past tense**  
*Genre: Realistic adolescent fiction, with many accurate cultural components*  
*Setting: Ecuador*  
My students liked this book, perhaps because it is rather short and they were able to read it on their own relatively easily. A boy travels to see relatives in Ecuador and learns that his life in the US is as sheltered as that of his upper class cousins. He is determined to photograph the “real” Ecuador. When he sees a poor girl with the most mysterious and piercing eyes, he tries to meet her again to help her. The descriptions of the eyes (pp. 21, 23, 26, 36, 40, 43 & 46) bring to mind the haunting photo of the Afghan girl in the June 1985 edition of National Geographic magazine. There are some references to the Galapagos Islands, which could be used as a spring board for further study. There are many references to class distinctions which can generate class discussions. A further teaching resource could be the film María Llena de Gracia, due the plot element of poverty and working in the flower factories in Ecuador. There are 18 versions of the phrase “darse cuenta de” in the book.
35. **Vida o muerte en el Cusco** Lisa Ray Turner & Blaine Ray  
*61 pages*  
*Intermediate-Low*  
*Past tense; Fiction; Peru*  
**Genre:**  
**Setting:**
36. **Vida y muerte en la marasalvatruchas** Anónimo  
*Intermediate-Low*  
*51 pages*     7,600 words     **149 words/page**  
*Biography*  
**Genre:**  
**Setting:**
37. **La corza blanca** (*Santillana Press, vocabularycontrollededition*) Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer  
*Intermediate-Low*



**26 pages**      **3,400 words**      **130 words/page**

*Past tense; Fantasy/folklore; Medieval Spain*

**Genre:**

**Setting:**

38. **La cruz del diablo** (*Santillana Press, vocabularycontrollededition*) Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

**Intermediate–Low**

**32 pages**      **3,600 words**      **113 words/page**

*Past tense; Fantasy/folklore; Medieval Spain*

**Genre:**

**Setting:**

39. **La hija del sastre**

CarrieToth& Carol Gaab

**Intermediate-Low**      **12,400 words**

**Genre:**

**Setting:***Fiction, Argentina*

40. **La guerrasucia**

Nathaniel Kirby

**Intermediate–Low**      **12,400 words**

**Genre:**

**Setting:***Historical fiction, Argentina*

## **LEVEL IV NOVELS**

***Listed in order from easier readability to harder***

41. **Viajes Fantásticos**

Elías Miguel Muñoz

**Intermediate–Mid**

**144 pages**

**Genre:**

**Setting:***Historical fiction and fiction, Mexico & Puerto Rico*

(McGraw-Hill Storyteller's Series; Introduction by Stephen Krashen)

42. **Ladrón de la mente**

Elías Miguel Muñoz

**Intermediate–Mid**

**136 pages**

**Genre:**

**Setting:** Fiction / Horror, Spain

(McGraw-Hill Storyteller’s Series; Introduction by Stephen Krashen)

43. Isla se luz

Elías Miguel Muñoz

**Intermediate–Mid**

**174 pages**

**Genre:**

**Setting:** Historical fiction, Caribbean

(McGraw-Hill Storyteller’s Series; Introduction by Stephen Krashen)

**Spanish Translations of Popular Literature**

44. Escalofríos: Bienvenidos a la casa de la muerte

R.L. Stine

**Intermediate–Low** (Reading level 4 in English)

**124 pages**

*Past tense*

**Genre:**

**Setting:** Adolescent horror fiction

45. ¿Quién se ha llevado mi queso?

Spencer Johnson, M.D.

**Intermediate–Low**

*Written in all tenses*

**Genre:**

**Setting:** Self-help book, fiction

46. El alquimista

Paulo Coelho

**Intermediate–Mid/High**

**197 pages**

*Written in all tenses*

**Genre:**

**Setting:** Historically/culturally/geographically/religiously/philosophically-based fiction

Highly recommended. See this resource to help students understand this

novel: <http://www.brycehedstrom.com/products>

47. Hoyos

Louis Sachar

**Intermediate–Mid** (Reading level 5 in English)

*All tenses, fiction*

**Genre:**

**Setting:**

48. **Harry Potter y la piedra filosofal**

J.K. Rowling

**Intermediate–Mid**(Reading level 5 in English)

**254 pages**

*All tenses, fiction*

**Genre:**

**Setting:**

49. **Harry Potter y la cámara de los secretos**

J.K. Rowling

**Intermediate–High**(Reading level 6 in English)

**286 pages**

*All tenses, fiction*

**Genre:**

**Setting:**

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHOOSING READABILITY ORDER**

*(How the novels were ranked to facilitate extensive reading)*

*The list above was compiled to help students pick reading materials for their Extensive Reading assignments. Students are required to read novels both in class and outside of class even at the lowest levels.*

### **ORDER**

*The novels on the lists are ranked from easiest to hardest based on their comprehensibility to the average HS language Spanish student. Traditional readability scores are based on length of book, sentence length, word length, rare words per thousand, etc. But those formulas may not apply as neatly to MS/HS students because:*

- 1) They can already read English*
- 2) Their expanded English vocabularies and cognitive ability can help them to recognize cognates*
- 3) They already know something about the world*
- 4) They have interests and prior knowledge about many topics*

*We can take advantage of all of these to help students learn to read in the TL and like it.*

### **READING LEVEL**

*The novels on the list are organized from easiest to hardest reading level based upon feedback from students, teacher experience and information provided by authors. Be careful about selecting books for independent reading based upon what is printed on the book. The reading level printed on the book by the publisher should be thought of as the **Guided Reading Level** (the level at which a student can read a novel with the help of a teacher) and not the **Independent Reading Level** (the level at which a student can read a novel on their own without the help of a teacher or extensive use of a dictionary). The independent reading will be lower.*

*It is always trying to figure out how the ACTFL levels correspond to the expected levels of students in our classes. A simple system might be: ACTFL Novice Low = level 1, Novice Mid = Level 2, Novice High = Level 3, etc. This is not just a firm description, just a working definition that can be used to try and organize a reading program.*

*The reading level printed on the novel does not always correspond to the actual comprehensibility of a novel because of the variables of linguistic ability, familiarity with a genre or author, and background knowledge. If students cannot understand what they are reading, they need to drop down the level or find a genre with which they are more comfortable.*

*A big problem with high achieving students is that they often choose books that are too hard for them. Do not allow them to fall into that trap. Teach them that they do not always have to be brilliant—that they can relax and read something that is interesting and enjoyable to them. They are not required to prove how bright they are all of the time.*

## **WORD COUNT vs. PAGE COUNT**

*The word count is important because there is so much variability between the number of words on a page from book to book. Even though all of these books would be considered text-rich books, or “chapter books” the words per page can vary between 50 and 200 due to many factors such as the size of the font, the amount of dialogue and the illustrations.*

*The total word count for each novel is based on the actual words in the story. It does not include glossing or vocabulary lists. The word count does not always correspond with the level of difficulty of a novel—a novel can still be at a lower reading level.*

## **DESCRIPTIONS**

*Descriptions such as “realistic fiction, fantasy, teen fiction, historical fiction, etc. We may need to make some of the definitions more concise so that they correspond to generally recognized categories and are helpful to students, teachers and administrators.*

## **USEFULNESS**

*The usefulness triple play is **comprehensibility, interest** and **cultural relevance**. Too often we have settled for only comprehension. Most of the novels on these lists hit all three areas: they are understandable to students, they have a story with an interesting plot (or at least some compelling points) and they have to do with the culture of the target language.*

## **READING REQUIREMENTS**

*Since there is such a close correlation between the amount of free reading and achievement in a language, students in levels 2-AP are required to read a certain number of words in Spanish each semester. In an interview by Ken Schimdt, foreign language reading researcher Beniko Mason([http://www.benikomason.net/articles/Interview\\_By\\_Ken\\_Schmidt/index.html](http://www.benikomason.net/articles/Interview_By_Ken_Schmidt/index.html))describes how she required Japanese university students learning English to read 70 to 100 pages per week—all together, about 1000 pages per semester:*

*Their reading speed in a second language is between 100 to 150 words per minute. The average native high school student reads about 200 words per minute in the native language, and the average college student reads 300 words per minute in the native language.*



*The reading speed in a second language is slower, but with consistency students can read a huge volume of words. In many elementary school reading programs, the goal is for each fourth and fifth grader to read 25 chapter books each school year to equal about one million words. This can be achieved with 15 minutes of reading per day. In a second language, students will not read as quickly but if we provide them with quality materials, teach them how to select appropriate books and train them to sit and read, they can accomplish great things.*

*What is a reasonable goal for high school second language learners? More is usually better, but start slow and train them to engage with books. Here is a reasonable schedule:*

- Level 1:** 10 minutes, twice a week times a week in class, plus kindergarten reading.
- Level 2:** 15 minutes, three times a week in class.
- Level 3:** 30 minutes, twice a week in class, plus 60 minutes a week outside of class.
- Level 4 & 5:** 50-60 minutes once a week in class, 90-180 minutes outside of class.

*Using valuable class time for reading in class is worth it to model the importance of reading.*